

## CONCEPT 9: CELEBRATING DELTA AGRICULTURE

### GOAL

The goal of this concept is to illustrate the important role the development of agriculture and agricultural practices have played in the evolution of social and economic systems of the Delta and their impacts on the nation.

### IMPORTANCE/SIGNIFICANCE

Inhabitants of the Delta region have long capitalized on the area's plentiful natural resources. The fertile soil, moderate climate, and abundant water supply provided ideal conditions for growing a variety of agricultural crops including corn, squash, tobacco, and indigo, but more significantly, timber, sugar cane, rice, and "king" cotton.

The early 1800s saw thousands of farmers surging west into the Mississippi valley. Land was rich, easy to acquire, seemed unlimited, and was exploited to the fullest. As the population grew across the region, farmers cleared forests, drained swamps, and cultivated cotton. For more than 100 years, "king" cotton dominated agriculture in the Delta. The plantation system, with its ownership of land, tools, and labor force flourished. Regarded by plantation owners as the most efficient method to meet the ever-increasing demand for cotton it became an economic as well as social control system. With the abolition of slavery and the Civil War, the plantation system collapsed, however, the legacy of that system can be seen in the physical remains of antebellum mansions and remnants of slave quarters and outbuildings throughout the Delta.

Early in the 19th century, Delta farming was accomplished mostly by hand labor often provided by slaves on a plantation. A few crude wooden tools assisted farming efforts until human power shifted to animal power in conjunction with new labor-saving devices, including steel or iron plows and corn and cotton planters.

After the Civil War, improved and new machinery enabled an increase in a farm's

cultivated acreage, and boosted corn, cotton, and tobacco production immensely. Many former slaves worked as tenants or sharecroppers on southern farms. Others migrated to urban areas in hopes of employment and higher wages.

Mechanization was slow in coming to the South, but by the end of WWII the horse age in farming was over. Many southern farmers ceased growing cotton and began raising soybeans, poultry, and cattle. Cotton production moved into west Texas, Arizona, and California under irrigation, while sugarcane and rice continued to be commercial crops in the Delta. Developments such as chemical fertilizers, insecticides, better crop strains, and improved farm machinery enabled farmers to cultivate more land and handle more livestock with less labor. Advances in science and technology lessened the need for laborers, and the number of farmers declined.

Trends in agriculture at the end of the 20th century include organic farming, less dependence on chemicals in response to environmental concerns, and farm production and distribution in the hands of corporations. Commercial agriculture has become a capital-intensive, rather than labor-intensive, specialized business.

"Agriculture was a powerful engine behind American economic development in the first half of the nineteenth century" (Foner and Garraty 1996). The Delta region was a prime contributor to the country's agricultural based economy. Before the Civil War, farm products comprised up to 82% of all exports, and cotton was especially important on the international market. Farm exports brought in foreign currency for investment in the country's transportation and manufacturing ventures. In addition, domestic farms supplied raw materials for the nation's leading manufacturers, including textiles and food products. Agriculture remained the most important activity in the Delta region's economy for nearly 200 years.

Today evidence of the earthquake phenomenon in this and the surrounding region is intimately related to the archeology. The incredible volumes of sand that erupted during the 1811–1812 earthquake events buried and preserved many of the archeology sites known today in the region. An educational opportunity exists today for students and visitors to learn about the geologic and cultural history discoveries of this fascinating area.

## **RESOURCES**

Existing resources such as museums, historic sites, scenic highways and byways, and agricul

tural fairs and festivals that demonstrate the importance of agriculture for the Delta would be used for implementing this concept.

Highway 165, the north/south corridor between Alexandria and Monroe is important in the history of Louisiana's timber industry. There are few structures remaining that recall the importance of the industry but small towns, including Clarks, Good Pine, Tioga, Woodworth, and Long Leaf contain properties from the National Register of Historic Places.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Arkansas**

14. Plantation Agriculture Museum, Scott
17. Good Earth Association, Inc., Pocahontes
18. Fargo Agricultural School Museum, Fargo
19. Lephieur Cotton Gin, Dermott
20. Stuttgart Agricultural Museum, Stuttgart
21. The Old Mill, Mountain View

### **Illinois**

1. Sauers Milling Company, Evansville
2. Walton Farms, LTD, Anna
3. Consolidated Grain and Barge Company, Mound City

### **Kentucky**

4. The Homeplace – 1850, Golden Pond
5. University of Kentucky Research and Education Center, Princeton

### **Louisiana**

29. Cotton Road Plantations of South and Central Louisiana
30. Cane River Plantation Tours
31. Creole Plantations of Cane River in Alexandria/Pineville area
32. Louisiana Cotton Museum, Lake Providence
33. Jeanerette Museum, along LA's Old Spanish Trail on Highway 182
34. Martin Homeplace Folklife Center, Columbia
35. Tobasco County Store and Visitor Center, Avery Island
36. Destrehan Plantation, Destrehan
37. Laura: A Creole Plantation, Vacherie
38. Magnolia Mound Plantation, Baton Rouge
39. LSU Rural Life Museum, Baton Rouge
40. Cinclare Sugar Mill, Baton Rouge Parish
41. West Baton Rouge Museum
42. Nottoway Plantation, White Castle
43. Tezcuco Plantation, Arrow
44. Kent Plantation House, Alexandria
45. Houmas House, Burnside
46. St. Francisville – Butler, Greenwood, Rosedown, Oakley

47. French Creole – Godhcaux Plantation House
48. Good Pine Lumber Company, LaSalle Parish
49. Rapides Lumber Company Sawmill manager's house
50. "The Oasis," in Clarks
51. Crowell Sawmill Historic District, Long Leaf
52. Tioga Commissary in Tioga
53. Alexander State Forest headquarters building in Rapides Parish
54. Louisiana Forestry Museum/Political Museum and Hall of Fame in Winnfield
55. Creedmore, along San Bernardo Scenic Byway (LA 46)
56. Magnolia Plantation, on St. Bernard driving tour, circa 1794
57. Oak Alley Plantation, Vacherie
58. Konriko, New Iberia

### **Mississippi**

22. Floewood River Plantation, Greenwood
23. Cottonlandia Museum, Greenwood
24. County Extension Office, Clarksdale
25. Hopson Plantation Headquarters and Commissary, Clarksdale
26. U.S. Department of Agriculture/Mississippi State University Research Facility, Stoneville
27. Cotton Row District, Greenwood
28. Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry/National Agricultural Aviation Museum, Jackson, MS

### **Missouri** (*Sites are accessible from Great River Road*)

6. Southeast Missouri Agricultural Museum, Bertrand Scott County
7. American Heritage Museum, Scott City
8. Agri-Business Farm Tours from Sikeston
9. A.C. Riley Cotton Gin, along New Madrid driving tour, New Madrid
10. Dillard Mill State Historic Site, Dillard
11. Bollinger Mill State Historic Site, Burfordville
12. Old Appleton Mill, between Cape Girardeau and St. Genevieve

### **Tennessee**

13. Cotton Row Walking Tour, Memphis